

Nurturing Faith Ideas 2019

Nurturing Faith Ideas are intended to link worship with our daily lives. In 2019, they are organized around a common theme each month. The Nurture Committee of the Presbytery of West Virginia encourages you to share them in your newsletters, bulletins, etc., as a way of nurturing faith in members of all ages.

JANUARY – EPIPHANY

January 6: The heaven proclaims a birth in Bethlehem. Following a star, Magi, or Wise Ones, journeyed to see what has occurred. They carry with them gifts. Upon arrival, they see God's heavenly glory on earth. Proclaiming God's praise, they fall down and worship. May we follow their example in our lives.

January 13: Epiphany, a time of wonder, a time of awe, is a time to recognize that God is here on earth with us through his son, Jesus Christ. God gave us a gift on that day so long ago – the knowledge that our God walks with us every day. Share that gift with all you meet.

January 20: We are often searching for something. Three men who are wise, who know how to read the signs are also searching – for a star – and they come to Bethlehem using their God-given talents. It was an incredible experience for them. We have been called to use our God-given talents as well. What talent might you have that will help people “find God?”

January 27: History records how even nature shared in proclaiming God's revelation in Christ. All of nature bows in adoration. Our worship should demonstrate that we have found our Savior as God promised. Take this message with you throughout this week, month, year, and always, and share it with others.

FEBRUARY – HUNGER

February 3: “Lord, even as we enjoy the Super Bowl football game, help us be mindful of those who are without a bowl of soup to eat.” That simple prayer in 1990 from a seminary intern at the Spring Valley Presbyterian Church in Columbia, SC, sparked a youth group, who then invited other area youth groups to join them to collect dollars and canned food for the needy. Today is Souper Bowl Sunday, and this offering continues. The first one, with 22 churches participating, raised \$5,700. In 2018, 3,769 groups participated and raised \$8,127,435 for local food pantries. Let's give thanks for all those who are willing to give back to their communities.

February 10: This week, find out from your local food pantry or other organization that provides food to those in need what they really need. Share with your church next Sunday, and plan to collect those items on a designated date.

February 17: It is estimated that the average American throws away 25 percent of food and beverages that are purchased. Pay attention to what you toss. What are ways you can avoid getting rid of good food?

February 24: The rate of poverty in the United States grows every year. In 2017, 11.8 percent of households experienced food insecurity. Being food insecure means that at times during the year, these households were unsure of their ability to have enough food to meet the needs of the family. You can help families by donating to your local food pantry year-round.

MARCH – LENT

March 3: As our PC(USA) worship resources remind us, the season of Lent is a time for prayer, fasting and self-examination in preparation for the celebration of the resurrection of the Lord at Easter. It is a period of 40 days – like the flood of Genesis, Moses’ sojourn at Mount Sinai, Elijah’s journey to Mount Horeb, Jonah’s call to Ninevah to repent and Jesus’ time of testing in the wilderness. (*For those of you doing the counting, the Sundays in Lent are not counted in this reckoning of the time between Ash Wednesday and Easter, as every Lord’s Day is a celebration of the resurrection of Jesus Christ.*) Think about 40 days. Does it seem like a short amount of time? A long period of time? Remarkably, a lot can happen in 40 days. Think about periods or seasons in your own life. Have you experienced something transformational in a period of 40 days? Commit to making the next 40 days meaningful.

March 10: The Season of Lent is traditionally a time when many communities of faith equip and nurture candidates for baptism and confirmation. In Baptism, we celebrate the grace of God that cleanses us from our sin and enfolds us into the Christian family. Our baptism is a glorious, free gift, and from it, we are also launched into our Christian calling. Reflect on these two things this week: the grace of God and God’s call in your life to active Christian service. How do they inform and strengthen each other?

March 17: During Lent, Christians often speak about giving up something – chocolate, meat, etc. – or we think about adding something into our daily life. Whatever you choose to do or not do over these next 40 days, remember this is a time to deepen your relationship with God. Consider adding a spiritual discipline into your day, such as fasting, prayer, or the Ignatian practice of examen, reflecting where you have experienced God’s presence in your day and where you have felt more drained and disconnected from God. Commit to what you choose, and trust God to be at work in your life.

March 24: There are many important symbols throughout Lent, many taken from the Scripture, which remind us of Jesus’s ministry and the events of Holy Week. These are a few examples of Lenten symbols: Ashes, Palms, Alabaster Flask, a Donkey, 30 Silver Coins, a Wash Basin and Towel, the Cross, Crown of Thrones and more. Consider taking one of these symbols and prayerfully exploring what the Bible says about them. You can find information about them at <https://www.presbyterianmission.org/wp-content/uploads/uniqueworshipideasforlent.pdf>.

March 31: One other tradition during Lent is that congregations refrain from saying "Alleluia," which means “Praise the Lord,” so that they can experience the joy of unveiling and saying the Alleluia again on Easter Sunday and throughout the Easter season. Some congregations “bury” or “hide” the Alleluia at the start of the season. In this Lenten season, which is more quiet and somber, reflect on your reasons for praising God. What draws you to worship each Sunday, and in what ways do you find yourself able to praise God in your every day? Journal about this.

APRIL – HOLY WEEK AND EASTER

April 7: Maundy Thursday is April 18. This is the day we remember the last meal that Jesus ate with his disciples before his death and gave them the command/mandate to love one another. John's gospel tells us that during that meal, Jesus washed his disciples' feet, and in doing that act, he taught us that it is better to be a servant than to expect people to serve us. How can you serve someone today?

April 14: Good Friday is this coming Friday. This is the day Jesus died on the cross. We might wonder why it is called "good" when it seems like a better name would be "bad" Friday. Some believe that in English the term "good" developed from an older name "God's Friday." "Good" is appropriate, though, because without the sadness of Good Friday and Jesus dying for our sins, we would not have Easter Day.

April 21: "Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the tomb." (John 20:1) Easter Sunday is a very important day in the Christian churches. Jesus rose from the dead to be with God so that our sins would be forgiven – God loves us that much. We can share God's love to other people. What can you do today to share God's love?

April 28: According to John 20:19-31, during the evening of Easter Day, Jesus appeared to the disciples, but the disciple named Thomas was not with them. When the disciples told him they had seen Jesus, he said unless he saw Jesus for himself, he was not going to believe that Jesus was alive. A week later, Jesus appeared again, and this time Thomas was there. When Jesus showed him the scars in his hands and feet from the cross, Thomas believed. What are the different ways we "see" Jesus today?

MAY – STEWARDSHIP OF CREATION

May 5: Read Job 12:7-9. All the plants and animals are sent from God and give glory to God. When we help to sustain the habitats for animals and keep the air, water and soil clean for plants we are helping all creation to give glory to God. Listen to the song "All Good Gifts" from the musical *Godspell* (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XXVuBaXvcd4>). What can you do this week to help creation to give glory to God?

May 12: Psalm 24:1 reads, *The earth is the Lord's and all that is in it, the world, and those who live in it.* What can you do this week to care for the earth? How does caring for the earth "and those who live in it" show that you are serving the Lord? How can society balance the needs of poor people with the needs of the earth? Discuss this with a friend or family member.

May 19: Genesis 1:28b; 31a reads, *Be responsible for fish in the sea and birds in the air, for every living thing that moves on the face of the Earth... God looked over everything he had made; it was so good, so very good.* Talk with your family about the plastic pollution in our oceans and other waters. What can we do to use less plastic? Discuss the pollution caused during the manufacturing processes that sometimes harms people and animals' health? Look up ways to reduce your plastics pollution at <https://www.oceanicsociety.org/blog/1720/7-ways-to-reduce-ocean-plastic-pollution-today>.

May 26: Isaiah 1:16b-17 reads, *...cease to do evil, learn to do good; seek justice, rescue the oppressed, defend the orphan, plead for the widow.* This passage shows us God's concern, which should be our concern, for the most vulnerable in our midst. All of the vulnerable human groups named in this passage suffer most when access to good, clean water is blocked. Do you know where your tap water comes from? If not, find out and educate yourself about the steps local authorities, environmental regulators, and your water provider take to ensure that your water – as well as that of the most vulnerable people in your community – is kept clean. If there is a problem with your community's water supply, work hard to make sure that problem is corrected. Learn more about watershed protection at https://dep.wv.gov/WWE/watershed/Pages/watershed_management.aspx

JUNE – PENTECOST

June 2: Preparing for Pentecost – When the disciples, were let out of prison, their jailer asked them, "...what must I do to be rescued?" Paul & Silas told him about God, then went with the jailer to his home, where he and his whole family were baptized and rejoiced. What makes you rejoice when you think about God? Write down one thing that makes you joyful, then share that with your family or a friend.

June 9: On the day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit came like the rush of wind and filled an entire house. Take a deep breath – as deep as your lungs will hold – then quickly let it out. Now, take a paper tissue, wad it up into a ball and set it on a table. Take another deep breath, then blow it out very hard against the tissue. Did it blow across the table? This is like the power of the Holy Spirit helping us move to do God's work.

June 16: On a map or on the internet, find the location of Egypt, Libya, and Rome. Then find Jerusalem. On Pentecost, people from all these places and others were in Jerusalem and heard the disciples teach about the things Jesus had said and done and that he had been resurrected. Think about what these people may have told their friends when they returned home from Jerusalem. Tell a friend or family member what you think some of these people may have said.

June 23: On the day of Pentecost, the Apostle Peter preached to the crowd in Jerusalem. He reminded them of scripture that told them that "everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." What are some of the names you use for God or Jesus? What is the name for God that you use the most?

June 30: One of the colors for Pentecost is red. Wear something red today to help you remember that Jesus is our Lord and that God sent the Holy Spirit to the believers in Jerusalem on Pentecost. Wearing red may remind you that God has also sent the Holy Spirit to you to help you do God's work.

JULY – BAPTISM

July 7: The Sacrament of Baptism is seen by many as one of those things you do for a baby – a moment to be recorded, along with birthdays, first steps, first words, and first solid food. We know that it is much more, but how often do we take the time to think about the words spoken and promises made at baptism to nurture a child to be a disciple of Jesus? There are promises for a lifetime, which we make on behalf of all children. How are you living out your promises towards the children in your church? In your life?

July 14: One of the most important influences on a child's faith development is parental involvement in church and sharing their faith. However, parents cannot do everything; it is important that we work every day to fulfill the promise we make to both God and parents to guide, protect, and teach their children about God. In what ways can you work to support the parents in your congregation?

July 21: In the Sacrament of Baptism, a congregation makes promises to the child or individual. This is a lifelong commitment, a vow to God, to be there for that child. In what ways can you make a difference in the life of a child in your church? Today? Tomorrow? Into the future?

July 28: In my church, when we have a baptism, the children of the church are invited to the front of the sanctuary. They stand looking down on the pastor, the parents, and the child being baptized. As we close the baptism, they lead the congregation in singing a version of Psalm 17:8, “Keep me, keep me as the apple of the eye: hide me, hide me in the shadow of thy wings.” Their presence is a reminder that the vows we take in Baptism are directed to all of God’s children, wherever and whenever they may be. What does this mean to you? How can you apply this in your life? Is there someone in your life, maybe on the periphery, that needs to know that they are loved because they are a child of God? Let them know.

AUGUST – STEWARDSHIP

August 4: Read Galatians 6:9-10. One of God’s great gifts to us is time, but we often view time as an oppressive enemy. “I don’t have time for...” is a statement many of us make every day. How might we view time as a friend? How might we use God’s gift of time to do good? It only takes a few seconds to offer a smile to a store clerk or to say thank you, or a few hours to help a friend with homework or prepare and teach a class. What are ways you can use your time to do good?

August 11: Read 1 Corinthians 12:4-13. Verse 7 says, *A demonstration of the Spirit is given to each person for the common good.* Those demonstrations might be called our spiritual gifts or our talents, which Paul says we are to use for the common good. What talents/abilities have you been gifted by the Spirit? How do or might you be a good caretaker (a good steward) of those talents as a way of loving God and loving neighbor – for the common good? Think of ways you are using your gifts now and ways you might use them in the future.

August 18: Read Matthew 6:19-21. Verse 21 says, *Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.* How do we consider our money to be treasure? Are we good stewards of the treasure with which God has gifted us, and does our stewardship reflect our values? The giving of our treasure, our money, is a way of expressing gratitude to God’s acts of graciousness towards us? How might that change your giving if you think of the act of giving as an act of gratitude?

August 25: Read John 18:33-37. Jesus says to Pilate, *You say that I am a king. I was born and came into the world for this reason: to testify to the truth. Whoever accepts the truth listens to my voice.* We don't often think of spreading the truth of the Gospel message as using our influence as a Christian. But influence is a gift from God as well, and being a good steward of spreading Jesus' message of love and service is being a good steward of the influence we have been given. How do you use your influence to help someone else? How does your church use its influence, its voice, to speak out on behalf of those who have no voice? If you don't know, ask your pastor or a member of the session.

SEPTEMBER – PEACEMAKING

Sept 1: We have been created to live together in community with one another. How might you connect your congregation and your local community so they may learn from each other and take action together to make the world around you a better place? Is there a neighborhood watch that you could participate in or begin?

Sept 8: God calls us to live together in peace. Consider new approaches to ACTIVE peacemaking that can be used in everyday life. An example of this could be “A Call to Prayer and Action.” When violence or unrest happens locally or abroad, pray and ask others to pray with you and gather donations for the affected community.

Sept 15: Encourage the session of your church to receive the PC(USA) Peace and Global Witness Offering. Share with your congregation some of the (PC)USA ministries that the offering goes towards. You will find this information at <http://specialofferings.pcusa.org/peace-global.html>.

Sept 22: Peacemaking takes many different forms. Individually, or with others, consider what organizations and agencies in your community are involved in peacemaking. Ask your church's session to invite a community leader to speak about a local program that is active in peacemaking.

Sept 29: Use your church's newsletters and bulletins and talk with others in your congregation to discover the programs your church offers that reflects peacemaking. Make a list of these and share with family members and friends to see what they might add to your list.

OCTOBER – COMMUNION

October 6: The first Sunday in October is designated World Communion Sunday. As we gather around the Lord's Table in our congregations, we also celebrate the sacrament with other Christians around the world and are reminded of the amazing diversity of Christ's church; we may be in different places, speak different languages, dress in different styles, have different color skin, yet we are all part of the one community of faith, the family of God, that gathers in

Christ's name, gathered by God's grace. In the coming week, what does World Communion Sunday mean to you and your faith? Share your thoughts with someone else.

October 13: Think about a special meal your family celebrates? What is on the table? Who is around the table? When we celebrate the Lord's Supper, the table is set with bread and wine/juice, and we gather with our church family. As the risen Christ feeds us at this table, we remember other meals that Jesus shared – feeding the 5,000; eating with friends; sitting at table with tax collectors, sinners and religious leaders; and the last meal with his disciples where he called the bread “his body,” and the cup “his blood of the covenant.” What are other things you might remember about Jesus as you celebrate communion? Share those with a friend or family member.

October 20: The Sacrament of the Lord's Supper is also called “Eucharist,” which means “thanksgiving.” As we gather at the table to celebrate the sacrament, we join in the Great Thanksgiving, a prayer in which we give thanks to God for God's faithfulness to God's people, for God's gift of Jesus and the Holy Spirit, and for God joining us together in Christ's church. When you participate in communion, what might you thank God for? Don't forget to share what you are thankful for with someone else, and ask them what they are thankful for.

October 27: Another word for the Lord's Supper is “Communion,” a word that sounds a lot like community and reminds us that we share this meal with the people with whom we gather to worship and, especially, the risen Christ, who invites us to eat even though we can't see him. We also believe that, as we eat and drink together at table, the Spirit joins us with all those who trust in Jesus of every time and place, past, present, and future. Who are some of those with whom you share your life now, or from your past, for whom you are glad to be able to share in Christ's table together? Share with someone whose name came to your mind.

NOVEMBER – REFORMATION

November 3: As Christians in the Reformed Tradition, Presbyterians acknowledge our need for God's grace to save us. No effort on our part can earn us God's favor; it is God's gift to us, so say thank you! Basic etiquette says when you receive a gift, you should write a thank you note. How? Express your thanks, add specific details about how you plan to use the gift, and repeat your thanks. Apply these hints to saying thanks to God the next time you pray. When it comes to grace, you'll never run out of things to thank God for!

November 10: One of the major changes in worship ushered in by the Reformation was that services were conducted in the language of the people rather than Latin, which was accessible only to the clergy and the well-educated. Imagine hearing the scriptures, the sermon, and the prayers in your own language for the first time! It allowed people to actively participate in the worship service and draw closer to God. The next time you open your Bible, give thanks that you can read every word and pray for those who are translating it into other languages so people all around the world can receive the same blessing!

November 17: Did you know that before the Reformation the congregation didn't sing hymns? There was beautiful music in the Roman Catholic Church, but it was performed by professional choirs and musicians. Luther believed "the vigorous singing of simple hymns could open the hearts and minds of God's people to embrace the Word of God." So he wrote hymns, original tunes and texts. Calvin preferred his followers sing the Psalms only. Isaac Watts created some of the best translations of the Psalms into English but figured there should be more songs about Jesus, so he wrote hymns like "When I Survey the Wondrous Cross" and "I Sing the Mighty Power of God." What are your favorite hymns to sing? Sing them today!

November 24: Prior to the Reformation, only the clergy could lead worship, but Luther and Calvin believed in the "priesthood of all believers." In the Old Testament, priests stood between God and God's people, taking God's word to the people and the peoples' praise and pleas to God. But it was also true that the whole people of God were called to be a witness to the nations. So, as Presbyterians, our worship and witness has room for clergy and elders and every member of the congregation to participate. How will you live out the "priesthood of all believers" this week? By leading worship? By sharing the good news? By serving your community? You are free to do it all!

DECEMBER – ADVENT

December 1: Today is the first Sunday of Advent. This time in the church calendar takes up the four weeks leading up to Christmas Day. Advent is a time of "expectant waiting" and getting prepared for the birth of Jesus Christ. What are things or people that you wait for? What are ways that you can prepare for Jesus' birth?

December 8: Your church sanctuary probably looks different during December. Look around at some of the decorations and symbols that have been added. Some churches bring in more candles during Advent to symbolize that Jesus is the light. What are other symbols that you see in your sanctuary that are helping you and your congregation prepare for Jesus' birth?

December 15: For many people, Christmas is a very happy and exciting time, but for others, it can be a sad time, especially if something upsetting happened in the past. Be mindful that not everyone enjoys this time of year. What are some ways you can help someone who is sad feel a little better?

December 22: Today is the Fourth Sunday of Advent. How does your family celebrate on Christmas Eve and Christmas Day? Are there traditions that you do every year? Reach out to other people and find out how other families celebrate.

December 29: The New Year is coming. Reflect on the past year with all its ups and downs. What are you looking forward to in 2020? How might you be a better disciple of Jesus Christ in the next year?